

House ag spending bill helps Central Valley

A federal spending bill passed in the House of Representatives includes funds for several projects in Fresno and Tulare counties, Rep. Devin Nunes announced.

"In addition to providing the funds for ongoing needs for local agriculture, this bill also offers some exciting opportunities to improve the quality of life for people living in the Central Valley," said Rep. Nunes, a member of the Agriculture Committee.

Most notably, the bill recommended funding be directed from the Department of Agriculture's Rural Development account for the Strathmore Public Utility District to develop a waste-



water treatment plant to dispose of copper-laden sludge that threatens the community's water quality.

"Given the pressing need to deal with this situation, I am confident the USDA will use the funds to resolve this problem," Rep. Nunes said.

The spending bill for the 2005 fiscal year includes soft earmarks for several projects. Soft earmarks are not required spending amounts, but they do signal Congress' intention for how agencies should spend the funding:

- ◆ \$382,000 for the Central California Ozone Study
- ◆ \$14 million for circuit riders who provide

assistance to small communities to improve water quality, as well as \$800 million for rural water grants and loans.

- ◆ \$7.1 million for the management and testing for Johne's Disease in dairy cattle

The appropriations bill also urges the USDA to fund the following projects:

- ◆ The International Agri-Center in Tulare, including a learning center, a new exhibit pavilion, an e-commerce initiative, and a commodities showcase.
- ◆ To improve farm-to-market roads in Tulare County.

Nunes supports increase for veterans

Rep. Devin Nunes and more than two-thirds of the House of Representatives voted to increase compensation to disabled veterans and their dependents.

H.R. 4175—the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2004—directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase compensation rates as of December 1, 2004, and requires future increases to be the same percentage as Social Security.

"This is the least we can do for the men and women who served in our military and became disabled as a result," Rep. Devin Nunes said. "By tying cost of living increases to Social Security we ensure that veterans are not left behind with infrequent raises in compensa-

tion rates."

Assuming a 1.5 percent increase in cost of living rates, spending in disability compensation for veterans will increase by nearly \$500 million in 2005, and by about \$620 million in later years.

This comes on the heels of a 15.3 percent increase in the Veterans Affairs budget this past year. In the past 10 years, overall veterans' spending has grown by 58 percent. Benefits, such as the GI bill, have more than doubled and per veteran benefits have increased 79 percent.

The bill must also be passed by the U.S. Senate and signed by the President before it becomes law.

In other votes, Rep. Nunes also helped pass the

Military Housing Improvement Act, which would lift the \$850 million cap for a private military housing program. The House raised the cap to \$1.35 billion, an increase of \$500 million.

The program allows the Department of Defense to turn over to developers and property managers the renovation, construction and management of residences for military families. The program has been successful at saving money and building homes faster than before the program was created.

Housing projects for 50,000 military families in 22 states will be put on hold in November if the cap is not increased.